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LEGAL ADVICE FOR SELECTIVES

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The work which state councils of defense have undertaken, to prepare selectives for service ranks, is one of the important constructive relief efforts of the war. The constructive element is especially prominent because this preparatory work makes relief, as usually understood, unnecessary at a later date for a large number of men and their dependents.

STATE COUNCILS AND LEGAL COMMITTEES

In order to prevent men from entering military service either through enlistment or through the draft before they have prepared their business affairs for absence, the Council of National Defense issued on February 4, 1918, a bulletin ¹ to state councils of defense, calling on them to appoint:

1. A State Legal Committee to perform the following duties:
 - (a) to draft and propose war emergency legislation for State Legislatures.
 - (b) to draw up a booklet of laws and legal rules of importance to soldiers and sailors entering the service, to be used by Local Legal Committees, as a handbook for their work, and as an instrument for making known to soldiers and sailors the need of legal preparation for their absence.
 - (c) to supervise the formation and work of the Local Legal Committees mentioned below.
2. A Local Legal Committee in each county to furnish free legal advice and assistance to soldiers and sailors with the following specific duties:
 - (a) to give legal advice as to the benefits of war risk insurance, allotments of soldiers' and sailors' pay by the Federal Government, family allowance, compensation, the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act, and other war emergency laws relating to men entering the service.
 - (b) to draft wills and attend to caring for the property of business men entering the service.
 - (c) to represent soldiers and sailors in court where necessary and obtain for them the benefits of the Civil Relief Act.
 - (d) to attend to such business matters as require and are capable of attention in the absence of men in the service.
 - (e) to report to the Red Cross Home Service Section cases requiring relief which come to the attention of the Committee.

¹ Bulletin No. 84.

It was recommended that these local legal committees should be composed primarily of lawyers, but should include in their membership a business man and a representative of the Red Cross Home Service Section. The further recommendation was made that any existing organized effort in the community for furnishing free legal advice to men entering the service, should be utilized in forming the local legal committee. It was specifically suggested that the personnel of the permanent Legal Advisory Board, created by the Provost Marshal General to assist registrants in filling out their questionnaires, should be the nucleus of the local legal committee of the councils of defense. This suggestion was made in order to correlate the work of these two organizations, and because the legal advisory boards are "composed of men already tried who have proved their zeal and fitness for such work."

At the time of the issuance of this bulletin, and since that time, the Council of National Defense has emphasized repeatedly that the most important function of the local legal committee is to make strenuous efforts to see each man entering the service personally, and to urge upon him the necessity of preparing his business and financial affairs for his absence. In a majority of states such legal committees have now been organized. These committees are working hand in hand with the home service sections of the American Red Cross and with the permanent legal advisory boards. Wherever consistent with local arrangements, the state council legal Committees are assisting the home service sections in handling legal matters. Similarly cases requiring the attention of the American Red Cross are referred by local legal committees to the nearest home service section.

STATE COUNCIL LEGAL HANDBOOK

The Council of National Defense recommended that each state council through its legal committee prepare and issue a legal booklet to assist local legal committees in furnishing legal advice and aid to men entering service. There are two valuable features of such a booklet. In the first place, it presents in brief compass the various matters a lawyer should cover in preparing a man's affairs for his departure. Most lawyers need such a document to assure them that they are raising with the men every question that should be settled, and that they are ferreting out and anticipating problems

which may arise in the future. In the second place, the legal booklet becomes the means of urging upon lawyers who have volunteered for this service, the importance of their taking the initiative in approaching men to advise them with regard to their legal affairs. These young men of small business experience, especially at this time of excitement, are not aware of the need and possibilities of legal preparation, and cannot be relied upon to come to the lawyers and present their own problems.

A suggested table of contents for such a legal booklet was later issued by the council. This presented not only an outline of the federal laws which should be included in the booklet, but also an outline of the fields of state law which should be covered.

As a result of this appeal of the National Council, a majority of the state councils have already issued, or are in the process of issuing, legal handbooks. In order to make available to states which have not yet issued their handbooks the benefits of the experience of other states, the Council of National Defense has sent copies of successful booklets to the various states.

It became evident early in April that lawyers in various sections of the country were taking advantage of men entering the service and of their dependents. In order to counteract this exploitation the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of the Navy, the American Bar Association and the Council of National Defense each issued warnings calling the attention of the public to the existing channels for securing free legal advice and assistance.

POPULARIZING NATIONAL RELIEF

In order to bring more effectively before the selectives the need of preparation before entering service, the Council of National Defense issued, on April 8, a bulletin² recommending the holding of meetings for drafted men under the auspices of the state and county councils. These meetings were intended as a means of giving the pre-draft men instruction in personal hygiene, information concerning camp life and their opportunities in the service, information concerning the service with which the American Red Cross stands ready to furnish them and their dependents, and especially to emphasize the need of legal assistance in preparing their affairs for departure.

² Bulletin No. 89,

On July 4, Provost Marshal General E. H. Crowder issued a recommendation to local draft boards, calling on them to create boards of Instruction.³ It is the duty of these boards of instruction to take personal, active, and direct measures to meet each Class I registrant, and to see that he understands why we are at war, what we are fighting for, and how he can best prepare himself for service. Because of the position of state and county councils of defense, and because of the work which many of them had already done with selectives, General Crowder recommended that the local draft boards work wherever possible with state and county councils of defense, in securing the personnel for the boards of instruction. Because of this recommendation, the Council of National Defense issued a bulletin⁴ explaining to state and county councils of defense the functions and duties of boards of instruction, and calling on them to assist the local draft boards in securing the best possible personnel for boards of instruction.

The main function of the local board of instruction is to build up the morale of selectives. This involves the education of selectives concerning the government provisions of the War Risk Insurance Act and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act to free them from worries or misunderstandings. This phase of the work, though not the most important for which boards of instruction are responsible, calls on them to take a part in the national propaganda to popularize the great national relief laws.

³ Letter of July 4, 1918.

⁴ Bulletin No. 102.